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ABSTRACT

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was founded in 1987 in response to recommendations regarding the central role of teachers in educational quality. NBPTS establishes rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do; operates a national voluntary system to assess and certify teachers meeting these standards; and advances related education reforms to improve learning. The NBPTS advanced teacher certification system is voluntary (intended to demonstrate experienced teachers' advanced levels of teaching skills and abilities). Teachers are measured against a set of standards established by experienced teachers, teacher educators, and subject-matter experts. NBPTS work is founded on five core propositions (e.g., teachers are committed to students and learning and teachers are members of learning communities). Using these propositions, NBPTS developed content standards for each certification field. Currently, NBPTS has standards available in 26 fields. With each standards document as a foundation, NBPTS works closely with experienced teachers and assessment development experts to develop the performance based assessment that will be the basis for awarding NBPTS certification. This digest examines the development of assessments from 1991 to 2001. Through two recent studies, the positive impact of NBPTS certification on teachers is being documented. (SM)

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DIGEST

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National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' National Teacher Certification

In 1983, public concern about the state of American education was sharply heightened by the issuance of a federal report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform*. With statements like, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," many educators, parents, business executives and legislators awoke to the economic and social consequences of an education system failing to keep pace with a changing American and global society.

In response to *A Nation at Risk*, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy established the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession "in recognition of the central role teachers play in the quality of education." The charge to the task force was to critically examine teaching as a profession and present its findings and policy recommendations in a report to the American people. In 1986, the task force fulfilled that charge by issuing *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. Chief among the task force's recommendations for making teaching "a profession of well-educated teachers prepared to assume new powers and responsibilities to redesign schools for the future" was to create a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards that would establish high standards for what teachers need to know and be able to do, and to certify teachers who meet those standards. The task force did not see national certification as a replacement for individual state licensing. Rather, they believed that for teaching to successfully transition from an occupation to a true profession in the eyes of the public, it needed to codify the knowledge and specific expertise required by experienced teachers, and then recognize those teachers who demonstrated that expertise.

Mission

In 1987, in direct response to the task force's recommendation, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (the National Board or NBPTS) was founded. The mission of the National Board was to be threefold: to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do; to develop and operate a national voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards; and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in America's schools.

The National Board's system of advanced teacher certification differs from state-level teacher licensing and certification in several important ways. First, a state's teaching license, required to teach within its jurisdiction, indicates that the licensee has satisfied a minimum level of requirements defined by the state, generally equivalent to entry-level teaching ability. By contrast, National Board Certification is a voluntary certification process intended for experienced teachers to demonstrate their advanced level of teaching skills and abilities. Second, state licensing standards vary from state to state, while National Board standards are uniform across the nation. Finally, teachers seeking National Board Certification are measured against a set of standards established by experienced teachers, teacher educators, and subject-matter experts in specific teaching fields.

Standards for Accomplished Teaching

In 1991, the National Board issued its initial policy statement, *Toward High and Rigorous Standards for the Teaching Profession: Initial Policies and Perspectives of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*. That statement identified the five core propositions on which all of the National Board's work is founded:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning,
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students,
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning,
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

Using these five core propositions as a foundation, the National Board focused on developing content standards for each certificate field in which the National Board would certify teachers. From the beginning, the National Board believed that a single certificate suggesting that "its holder is proficient in teaching all subjects to all students of all ages is unwarranted" (NBPTS, 1991, p. 41). Consequently, NBPTS established a certificate framework that included 31 certification fields that are identified by the developmental age of the children and the subject matter being taught. Today, the National Board's certificate framework includes the following certificate fields:

- Early Childhood (ages 3-8) — Generalist
- Middle Childhood (ages 7-12) — Generalist, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies–History
- Early and Middle Childhood (ages 3-12) — Art, English Language Arts, English as a New Language, Guidance and Counseling, Library/Media Specialist, Music, Physical Education, and World Languages Other than English
- Early Adolescence (ages 11-15) — Generalist, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies–History
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood (ages 14-18+) — English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies–History
- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (ages 11-18+) — Art, World Languages Other than English, Guidance and Counseling, Music, Physical Education, Health, English as a New Language, and Career and Technical Education
- Early Childhood through Young Adulthood — Exceptional Needs Specialist (birth to 21+) and Library/Media (3-18+)

As of November 2001, the National Board has standards available for 26 certificate fields; the development of standards in five remaining certificate fields is underway. The National Board views its standards as living documents that are meant to evolve along with the teaching fields they address. Therefore, all National Board standards are reviewed and revised on a regular cycle.

A Performance-based Assessment System

With each standards document as a foundation, the National Board works closely with a team of experienced teachers and assessment development experts to develop

the performance-based assessment that will be the basis for awarding National Board Certification. All teacher developers are identified through a peer merit review process. From the beginning, the National Board has been committed to developing an assessment that is performance-based that also serves as a professional development opportunity for teachers.

1991-1996

Assessments developed for and delivered during the first three assessment cycles were developed by individual Assessment Development Laboratories (ADLs). All of the assessments adhered to a common two-component model, but varied in the number and type of exercises that made up each component. The two components of each assessment were the school-site portfolio and the assessment center. For those early assessments, the ADLs worked closely with an advisory group of measurement specialists known as the Technical Analysis Group (TAG). They developed and field-tested exercises that focused on portfolio documentation of practice, as well as classroom observation gathered through videotaped segments of classroom instruction and on-site classroom visits.

1997-2000

Beginning with the 1996-97 assessment administration, the National Board moved all of its assessment development and delivery activities to a single general contractor: Educational Testing Service (ETS). At that time the National Board also adopted a uniform assessment structure across all of its certificates. This uniform assessment structure included a school-site portfolio that contained six entries – four classroom-based entries and two Documented Accomplishments Entries that focused on the teachers' work outside the classroom. Further, for every assessment, two of the classroom-based entries focused on student work samples and two used videotaped segments of the teachers' classroom instruction as the primary source of evidence. The two Documented Accomplishments Entries focused on the teachers' work outside their classrooms – with their professional communities, families, and their local communities – and how that work served to advance student learning. All six entries in the portfolio centered on a Written Commentary in which the teachers would describe, analyze and reflect on how their teaching practice, as reflected in the evidence they presented, met the National Board's standards for accomplished practice.

The second component of the assessment focused on four 90-minute subject matter specific prompts delivered to the teachers at a secure assessment center site. These prompts were designed to tap the teachers' depth and breadth of content knowledge, as well as their knowledge of how to teach that content to students of a specific developmental level.

2001-Present

The portfolios for the next generation of assessments include three classroom-based entries; two of which require teachers to videotape classroom interactions, and one of which requires teachers to collect and submit student work samples. Each portfolio entry requires a Written Commentary describing, analyzing, and reflecting on how the evidence provided demonstrates the teachers' accomplishment with respect to the National Board's Standards.

In addition to completing the classroom-based entries, most certificate areas require the teachers to complete an entry in which they document their work outside the classroom; with families and the larger community, and with colleagues and the larger profession. In this entry, which emphasizes the quality of the teachers' contributions rather than the quantity, teachers are asked to show evidence of their accomplishments and comment on the impact and importance of these accomplishments for student learning.

The assessment center component of the next generation assessments consist of six 30-minute exercises that focus on teachers' content knowledge and their knowledge of how to teach that content to students at the specific developmental level. The assessment exercises will continue to be computer-administered at more than 300 secure testing centers across the United States.

Documenting the Impact

As of November 2001, a total of 16,030 teachers across the United States have earned National Board Certification. That number is expected to grow to nearly 100,000 by 2006. As the research and development work for the standards and assessment winds down, the National Board is refocusing its research agenda on the impact of National Board Certification and National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) on quality teaching and improved student learning in America's schools. The first of these studies, *The Certification System of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: A Construct and Consequential Validity Study* (Bond, et al., 2000) provides strong initial evidence that the National Board's certification system does identify teachers who are significantly more expert in their teaching practices and whose students achieve deeper understanding of the content being taught.

Through two recent studies the National Board has begun to document the positive impact that the NBPTS certification process has on teachers. These studies show that teachers who participate in the National Board's certification process—whether as candidates or assessors—find that the process: (1) is an excellent professional development experience; (2) has a strong effect on their teaching practice; and (3) has a positive effect on their students and their interactions with other teachers, administrators, and communities (NBPTS, 2001a, 2001b). In coming years the National Board will continue to support research that will evaluate, validate, and advance its work.

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